Dear faculty and staff members,

Dear students,

I am happy to present you with a new edition of the WAGS newsletter. Our coordinator and computer whiz Stacy Hotte did a fantastic job in designing a new layout. On the next pages you will find even more information on the WAGS program and its events in a very appealing format. Thank you, Stacy!

Like in the previous semesters, we will sponsor around 30 events this term. I didn’t want to miss this opportunity to thank our sponsors from last semester without whom this series of thought-provoking activities would not have been possible. We are particularly grateful to the Rohatyn Center for International Affairs, the Office of Institutional Diversity, the Dean of Students’ Office, the Academic Enrichment Fund, the Alliance for Civic Engagement, Brainerd, Wonnacott, and Ross Commons, the Departments of American Studies, Chemistry, Film & Media, History, Music, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology/Anthropology, Spanish, and student groups Women of Color, African American Alliance, MOQA, Feminist Action at Middlebury and the Student Global AIDS Campaign.

In the spring semester, Chellis House is embarking on a new initiative. For the first time this year, we will participate in the "Relay for Life" on April 20 and 21. Initiated by the American Cancer Society, this overnight event spreads awareness of cancer prevention, treatments and cures. It celebrates survivorship and raises money for research to find more cures for cancer. The Middlebury Relay will take place on and around the running tracks behind the Athletic Center. Among other events, it will feature “Luminaria,” a night-time candle-light relay. If you would like to be part of our team, please let me know. If you would like to sponsor one of our team members, please go to the website www.acsevents.org/relay/vtmiddlebury and click on “Chellis House Team.” Middlebury College was the first Vermont campus to host the “Relay for Life.” Last year, it raised over $175,000. We are trying to beat this record this year.

January was “Cervical Cancer Awareness Month.” Many cervical cancers are caused by the human papamillavirus (HPV). Last year, the FDA approved Gardasil, a vaccine against the four most common types of HPV for females aged 11 to 26. Studies are currently under way to find out whether the vaccination works to prevent infection and disease in males. Although the verdict is still out, an encouraging trend is developing all over the United States: In January, New Hampshire was the first state to provide the vaccination free of charge. The governor of Texas even made the vaccine mandatory. All these developments are very promising. The College’s Health Center will order in a prescription and apply the injections.

Have a healthy semester!
Karin Hanta

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Armelle Crouzières-Ingenthron (French Dept.) received a CV Starr Grant to go to Paris and do research on a project entitled “Children and Civil Wars in Sub-Saharan African Francophone Literature” in January of 2007. Armelle was also asked to be a member of the editorial board of the Cincinnati Romance Review.

Juana Gamero de Coca (Spanish Dept.) published a book entitled Nación y género en la invención de Extremadura: soñando fronteras de cielo y barro (Nation and gender in the invention of Extremadura: dreaming of the limits of the sky and the mud) (Mirabel: Pontevedra, Spain, 2005).


Bettina Matthias (German Dept.) published a book The Hotel as Setting in Modern German-Austrian Literature: Checking In to Tell a Story (Camden House Publishers: Rochester, NY. August 2006)

Sujata Moorti (Women’s and Gender Studies) was the co-author of “Television’s ‘New’ Feminisms: Prime-Time Representations of Women and Victimization” published in Critical Studies in Mass Communication 23, 4 (2006). She was also asked to serve on the editorial board of International and Intercultural Communication Annual.

Kevin Moss (Russian Dept.) published “Queer as Metaphor: Representations of LGBT People in Central and Eastern European Film” in Beyond the Pink Curtain: Everyday Life of LGBT People in Eastern Europe (Kuhar, Roman and Judit Takacs, eds. Peace Institute: Ljubljana, 2006). His article “Who’s Renting These Boys? Wiktor Grodecki’s Czech Hustler Documentaries” was published in InterAlia: An Online Journal of Queer Studies 1 (2006), (refereed). Kevin also gave a talk entitled “Getting the Gay Millennials” at the December 2006 meeting of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division, Washington DC). The panel was on “Issues and Challenges in Teaching LGBT Topics.”

Patricia Saldarriaga (Spanish Dept.) published a book entitled Arquitectura y cuerpo femenino en el Primero sueño de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Architecture and the female body in the first dream of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz) (Vervuert/Iberoamericana: Madrid/Frankfurt: 2006.).


The American Association of University Women awarded a Campus Action Project grant to a team led by Ann Mari May (Economics Dept.) for a project entitled “Working for Working Women;” other team members include students Abigail Blum, Tarsi Dunlop, Hallie Fox, and Emily Theriault and co-advisors Sujata Moorti (Women’s and Gender Studies Program), Karin Hanta (Chellis House) and Gail Smith (Physical Education Dept.). The main activity funded by the grant will be a symposium from March 15 to 17 entitled “Breaking Down the Barriers to Equity: Women in the Workforce” (see calendar entry on p. 4).

IN THE THEATER
This spring a number of plays revolve around gender issues:

The Five Hysterical Girls Theorem
By Rinne Groff, Directed by Cheryl Farone. Romance, intrigue, deceit, and death are on display in Rinne Groff’s comeuppance for the fifth grade teacher who threatened to flunk her in math.
Tues, April 3, 12:30 Behind the Scenes Lunch and Discussion at Wright Theatre.
April 5 and 6, 8 p.m.
April 7, 2 and 8 p.m.

On the Verge
Senior Work by Laura Harris and Lauren Kiel
Three Victorian women adventurers treacherously maneuver their way through Africa.
Hepburn Zoo Theater
April 12, 8 p.m.
April 13, 8 p.m. and 11 p.m.
April 14, 8 p.m.

Cabaret
by Joe Masteroff
Directed by Claudio Medeiros
Seeler Studio Theater
May 4-6, May 10-12, 8 p.m.
By Tamara Vatnick
The “Global AIDS panel” showed me personally that I actually knew very little about AIDs. Although I have not done any research on the matter, it seems to me that much of my generation is in a similar situation. We were born into a world with AIDS, and those of us who received sex education in highschool mostly learned that AIDS was a sexually transmitted disease that one could die from. Therefore, it was very important never to have unprotected sex. However, nobody gave me the statistics on which segments of the world population were most likely to contract HIV, and why that might be. No one ever suggested that there were very concrete reasons that certain populations—black women in the United States, people in central Africa—had the highest growing rates of HIV infection. I think that what this panel showed me is that the general American public looks at AIDS as a mere disease, a medical problem that only doctors and scientists need to be concerned about. But in reality, AIDS is a social problem. It is more than a medical epidemic, it is a frightening indicator of how American white capitalist society is getting richer and more privileged and leaving the rest of the world behind.

By Nikko Arger
I was very impressed with the caliber of speakers that participated in the “Global AIDS panel” last December. As a biochemist, I am interested in the physiological aspects of the disease and its pathology. I was most surprised by the fact the Middlebury had once offered a J-term class that addressed the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the early and mid-90’s and doesn’t do so anymore. To me, this was an example of what was discussed in the rest of the panel: that HIV/AIDS has fallen out of the headlines and an attitude of complacency has arisen around the subject in the general public. I knew that the epidemic has been and continues to ravage sub-Saharan Africa, but what I did not fully realize was that this region is so hard hit because the epidemic becomes concentrated in areas that already have underlying socio-economic and health problems. High rates of HIV infection and the progression to AIDS occur in areas where nutrition is poor and access to effective healthcare is minimal. This is the case in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, but what also surprised me was that poor communities in the United States are affected as well. I was encouraged when I learned that with $9 billion funds, current treatments could be used world-wide over the next ten years to almost halt the spread of the epidemic, which would eventually lead to its eradication. I am discouraged, however, when I think that a project on this scale will probably not be carried out under current national leadership in industrialized countries such as the U.S. The complacency that has arisen with the epidemic in this nation, including here at Middlebury, needs to stop if we are to confront the disease seriously.

As a gay man, I find the topic very relevant given the history of the disease and the social stigmas it has created and reinforced in the gay community. At Middlebury and beyond, I feel challenged by the fact that my straight friends remain complacent in the fight against AIDS because they continue to associate HIV/AIDS with gay men. I fear that they see my passion to fight the disease as a manifestation of my being gay. I believe that if we are to remain loyal to the cause, we should remember that the gay community has been one of the hardest hit by this epidemic and honor the progress it has fought for over the years. However, striking a balance between remembering the gay community and trying to include everyone in the fight will continue to be a difficult task. Everyone needs to recognize that no one is immune to this epidemic and it will continue to spread; our generation will be defined by how we respond to it.

By Christine Bachman
Born in the 1980’s, our generation is one that has always lived with the knowledge of the AIDS virus. The presence of AIDS in our world has shaped much of today’s reality. With the first widespread U.S. exposure to AIDS at first plaguing the gay male populations, AIDS simultaneously crippled the gay community with more fear, silence, and prejudice, but it also served in some ways as a unifying issue, its urgency motivating gay activists to speak up louder than ever for gay rights in the United States. Much has changed in the past twenty years, and we have come to view AIDS/HIV as a global issue, rather than a homosexual disease. But what does that mean? How is the AIDS virus of the 1980’s and the AIDS/HIV virus of 2007 similar and how is it different?

Many of us think about AIDS in two ways: i) a problem of the gay male community during the 80’s or ii) a problem that is plaguing women in Africa. These perspectives are simplistic and ignorant, placing responsibility and blame on the “other,” whether that be the homosexual man, or the African woman. What is a more informed and productive way of thinking about AIDS/HIV today? To truly take responsibility for AIDS/HIV, we must first understand the way in which AIDS/HIV is heavily influenced by our environment—it is not just a medical issue, but a social one, involving the economy, social policy, religion and culture, and societal prejudices. The similar environmental conditions which “othered” populations like gay men and African women face, are directly connected to the AIDS/HIV virus. We then must identify these factors and work to improve the social conditions of our world, thereby acknowledging that in order to eradicate AIDS/HIV, proper consideration of both medicine and social policy is necessary.
WAGS
Spring Events

“Shopping: A Love/Hate Story”
Lecture by author and journalist Judith Levine and Bill McKibben, scholar-in-residence in Environmental Studies

Time and place tba

Monday, February 26, 12:15 p.m.
Bi Hall 411

“Making Babies in the 21st Century”
“Life of the Mind” Series lecture by Catherine Cometbles, Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Biology, Middlebury College

Beyond Binaries:
Race, Gender and Violence, a film series
Tuesday, February 27, 7:00 p.m.
Sunderland 203

“Hip Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes” (Byron Hart, 2006, 61 mins.)
An official selection of the 2006 Sundance Film Festival, “Hip Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes” provides a riveting examination of representations of manhood in hip hop culture.

Wednesday, February 28, 4:30 p.m.
Library 201

“Silent Choices” (Faith Pennick, 2007, 60 mins.)
“Silent Choices” examines the impact abortion has on the lives of African American women. It depicts the juxtaposition between racial and reproductive politics, and it also tells the stories of three Black women who had abortions.

Thursday, March 1, 4:30 p.m.
Library 201

“NO! Confronting Sexual Assault in Our Communities” (Aishah Shahidah Simmons, 2006, 94 mins.)
One out of three women in the United States will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Through testimonies from Black women survivors, commentaries from acclaimed African-American women scholars and community leaders; impacting archival footage, spirited music, dance, and performance poetry, “NO!” unveils the reality of rape, other forms of sexual violence, and healing in African-American communities.

Wednesday, March 7, 4:30 p.m.
Library 201

“Searching for Angela Shelton” (Angela Shelton, 2006, 94 mins.)
Filmmaker Angela Shelton journeys across the United States meeting other Angela Sheltons in an effort to survey women in America. She discovers that 24 out of 40 Angela Sheltons have been raped, beaten or molested — 25 if she includes herself.

Panel discussions following each screening.

Monday, March 5, 4:30 p.m.
Library 201

“Graphic Details: The Black Civil Rights Movement in Contemporary Gay Cultural Production”
Lecture by Siobhan Somerville, author of Queering the Color Line and associate professor of English and the Gender and Women’s Studies Program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Tuesday, March 6, 4:30 p.m.
Warner Hemicycle

“The “Other” Latinas: Brasileiras in the United States”
Lecture and panel discussion with Bernadette Bessera, Rockefeller Fellow, Latin American and Latino Studies Program, University of Illinois, Chicago; and Heiloisa Galvão, co-founder of the Brazilian Women’s Group, an organization that promotes political and cultural awareness, and contributes to the development of the Brazilian community in the Boston area.

Wednesday, March 7, 12:15 p.m.
Chellis House

“Reproductive Rights Education in Latin America”
Student talk by Kolbe Franklin (‘08) on her internship with the Feminist Majority to promote reproductive rights in Latin America and her subsequent work in Buenos Aires hospitals.

Thursday, March 8, 7:00 p.m.
Chellis House

Alison Fraker Prize Reception
Every year, the Women’s and Gender Studies Program awards the Alison Fraker Prize for the best paper in the field of women’s and gender studies produced for any Middlebury College course during the preceding calendar year.

Monday, March 12, 7:00 p.m.
Bi Hall 104

“Fun Home”
Lecture by cartoonist Alison Bechdel

Tuesday, March 13, 4:30 p.m.
Robert A. Jones ’59 House Conference Room

“Foreign Correspondents in the War in Afghanistan”
Lecture by William Gentile, assistant professor and artist-in-residence, School of Communication, American University.

Wednesday, March 14, 12:15 p.m.
Chellis House

Student talk by Luisa Covaria (‘09) and Aakash Mohpal (‘09)

Thursday, March 15, 7:00 p.m.
Dana Auditorium

“Gobi Women’s Song”
Film screening and Q&A with director Sas Carey

“Breaking Down the Barriers to Equity: Women in the Workforce” Symposium

Thursday, March 15, 7:00 p.m.
Robert A. Jones (‘59) Conference Room

Keynote address: Heidi Hartmann, President of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research

“Memo to John Roberts: The Gender Wage Gap is Real”

Friday, March 16, 12:30 p.m.
Library 201

Panel Discussion: “A Road Less Traveled: Women in Nontraditional Fields”

Lecture: Wendy Love, Chair of Governors Commission on the Status of Women

Screening and discussion of the movie “The Motherhood Manifesto”
6:30 p.m. MBH 219
Saturday, March 17
Deliberative Dialogue: “Equal Pay for Equal Work”
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. LaForce 121 Seminar Room

Policy Writing Workshop: “Making America Work for Working Women”
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. LaForce 121 Seminar Room

Tuesday, March 20, 4:30 p.m.
Robert A. Jones ('59) Conference Room

“Women in the Conquest of America”
Lecture by Juan Maura, Associate Professor of Spanish, University of Vermont. Professor Maura is the author of Españolas de Ultramar: En La Historia y en La Literatura (Spanish Women in Colonial Latin America in History and Literature) (University of Valencia, 2005). In this work, he traces the lives of female adventurers, writers, soldiers, and servants as well as of governesses, prostitutes, businesswomen, nuns, and enslaved women from the 15th to the 17th centuries.

Wednesday, March 21, 7:30 p.m.
Center for the Arts Concert Hall

Margaret McArthur Tribute Concert
Performers of Vermont folk music include: the Boys of the Lough, Gordon Bok, Megan, Dan and Gary MacArthur (Margaret’s adult children), John Roberts and Tony Barrand, Pete and Karen Sutherland.

Monday, April 2, 12:15 p.m.
Chellis House

“Antigone: Tragic Heroine for Philosophers and Feminist Theorists”
“Life of the Mind” Series lecture by Martha Woodruff, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Middlebury College

Tuesday, April 17, 12:15 p.m.
Chellis House

“More than an Ally: Children of LGBTQ Parents”
Student talk by Christine Bachman ('09), member of the board of directors of COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere)

Friday, April 20 - Saturday, April 21

Muslims and the State in the Post-9/11 West

Monday, April 25, 12:15 p.m.
Chellis House

“Plastic: A Theory of the Material World”
“Life of the Mind” Series lecture by Laurie Essig, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Middlebury College

Gensler Travel Grants Awarded

Tracy Young ('08) and Christine Bachman ('09) were the fall recipients of the Gensler Travel Award. Tracy attended the “Youth Leaders Summit on Global Health” in New York City. Christine attended the “LGBTQ Family Conference” in Dallas. The Gensler Travel Fund is designed to promote student research and conference participation. The travel grant will be available to students who want to participate in a conference exploring issues pertaining to women, gender and/or sexuality up to an amount of $250.00 and who at the time of travel have completed or are enrolled in at least one course in Women’s and Gender Studies. Students seeking funds to participate in conferences during the spring semester should apply for grant funds by April 1. The application should include a conference schedule, the travel dates, a budget and a statement explaining how conference participation will further academic work. All recipients of travel grants are expected to participate in a lunch time presentation where they will delineate their findings and experiences.
Spring Course Offerings

**WAGS 0200 Foundations in Women’s and Gender Studies**
This course provides an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of women’s and gender studies. Examining gender always in conjunction with the categories of race and class, the course foregrounds how inequalities are perpetuated in different fields of human activity and the creative ways in which groups have resisted these processes. The course is organized in sections to illuminate the effects of particular social institutions and structures on our gendered lives. Each section will introduce a broad overview of feminist interventions in different fields of inquiry. Cumulatively, the course reveals the importance of gender as an analytical category to understand social reality and to comprehend important areas of culture. SOC CMP (S. Moorti)

**WAGS/GRMN 0228 Women’s Fictions in German-Speaking Countries (in English)**
This course provides an overview of women’s cultural productions from the Weimar period to Reunification and explores issues of gender, female authorship, personal and national identity, and the politicization of the private sphere within the German cultural context. LIT SOC EUR (R. Russi)

**WAGS/ENAM 0254 American Women Poet**
We will examine the rich tradition of lyric poetry by women in the U.S. Beginning with the Puritan Anne Bradstreet, one of the New World’s earliest published poets, we continue to the 19th century and Emily Dickinson, along with the formidable line of “poetesses” who dominated the popular poetry press in that era. We examine the female contribution to the Modernist aesthetic in figures like Millay, Moore, H.D. and Gertrude Stein; the transformation of modernist ideals by Bishop, Plath, Sexton, and Rich; and, among the postmodernists, Lyn Hejinian and Susan Howe. 3 hrs. lect./disc. LIT NOR USA (B. Millier)

**WAGS/ENAM 0254 Sociology of Heterosexuality**
Most people believe that heterosexuality is natural or rooted in biology and so never look very closely at it as a product of culture. In this course we will examine the artifacts, institutions, rituals, and ideologies that construct heterosexuality and the heterosexual person in American culture. We will also pay close attention to how heterosexuality works alongside other forms of social power, especially gender, race, and class. SOC NOR USA (L. Essig)

**WAGS/SPAN 0364 Educating Women in the Spanish Golden Age**
In this course we will study a number of literary works that deal with the educational discourse developed for women in the Hispanic world of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Through narrative, drama, poetry, and art, we will examine the pedagogy for the positioning of women in religious, political, philosophical, and literary life. We will also concentrate on the subversive strategies used by women to respond to these discourses. Authors will include: Juan Luis Vives, Fray Luis de León, Huarte de San Juan, Teresa of Avila, María de Zayas, Calderón de la Barca, Lope de Vega, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Satisfies the IS advanced language requirement in Spanish. (At least two SPAN courses at the 0300 level or above, or by waiver) 3 hrs. lect./disc. LIT EUR (P. Saldarriaga)

**WAGS/ENAM 0372 Gender and the South Asian Diaspora**
In this interdisciplinary course we will trace social, political, and economic experiences as well as the aesthetic expressions of South Asians dispersed around the world. Beginning with a theoretical exploration of the concept of diaspora we delineate the historical specificity of the subcontinental experience. The key topics we will consider are labor, the politics of gender and sexuality, cultural production of desi identity, and religion. The course will include literary texts, films, art, and multimedia production. LIT AAL OTH CMP (S. Moorti, Y. Siddiqi)
The aim of this course is to gain a deeper understanding of gender issues and economic theory, with particular focus on definitions of what constitutes work from a global perspective, the impact of globalization, and the relationship between social provisioning and social justice. The course will explore these topics, challenging mainstream economic perspectives that treat women as invisible, economic outcomes as purely a matter of choice, and economic theory as objective and unbiased. This course examines contemporary critiques of gender inequality in economic theory, economic life and policy-making, offering an alternative framework to explore arrangements surrounding economic provisioning. The course will be conducted in a discussion format. ECON 250 or ECON 255 or by approval. (A. May)

Feminism has often been construed as a western social movement, and therefore not particularly applicable to women’s situations in other parts of the world. In some Asian countries national feminist movements are discounted as western imports. This view of feminism assumes the existence of two relatively homogenous, discrete blocks - the “East” and the “West” - and often posits the relationship between the two as one of resistance, in which the former attempts to defend its “culture” against ever-increasing encroachment by the latter. A closer social and cultural analysis of two national feminisms representing each of these locations will serve to challenge this assumption. More specifically, a cross-cultural comparison of Japanese and French feminisms will highlight commonalities between specific segments of the two movements, thereby disrupting binary and reified notions of national cultures and regional divisions. The following themes concerning the history and development of each movement will be considered: cultural authenticity, nationalism/ethnicity, motherhood, sexuality and reproduction, colonial history, social class, the relationship between grass-roots movements and academic theory, and political reforms. 3 hrs. sem.CMP (W. Poulin-Deltour, L. White)

Christine Bachman is a sophomore Feb and a Women’s and Gender Studies and Sociology/Anthropology double major. On campus, she is a member of the Bobolinks a cappella group, and very actively involved in MOQA, serving as Co-President beginning in the fall. Off campus, she is a Co-Chair of COLAGE’s (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere) national board of directors, and is committed to the LGBTQ movement.

Baylie Roth is a sophomore Feb and cares passionately about the environment and feminism. She feels that feminism encompasses all of the different types of activism that deal with race, sexual orientation, gender, the environment etc. Her personal activism is derived from this passion for the environment and the ways in which humans are destroying it. Baylie believes in the hands-on, local approach to loving the earth.

Zohra Safi is a sophomore from Afghanistan. Her favorite part about being at Middlebury is getting involved in discussions with friends over the issues of peace and gender equality. These conversations help her evolve her understanding of world issues and needs. She strongly believes in the wisdom of a Gandhi quote that “We must become the change we want to see”. If any person expects an evolution in a society and believes that what he/she is doing is just and fair, they must speak up and become active without fear of the outcome. Being at Middlebury has taught Zohra to stand up and do “what I consider is rightful.”

Gorretti Namuli is a sophomore and a graduate of the Red Cross United World College in Norway. Her experience in Norway has made her realize her identity. She is proud and not ashamed to be a black woman from Uganda. Being at Middlebury has not only strengthened her roots, but has also deepened her knowledge of different issues that directly or indirectly impact her. Learning about American culture and other cultures has pushed her to extend beyond her comfort zone and tackle some of the pressing contemporary issues. Gorretti is a Biochemistry major and Women’s and Gender Studies minor and is eager to link these two great fields of knowledge to improve Uganda’s future.

Aifuwa Ehigiator is a junior Economics and Women’s and Gender Studies joint major from Brooklyn, NY. He is the Vice President of the African American Alliance and Distinguished Men of Color and also a part time rugby player. Aifuwa is interested in Working Class People Music and the future. One of his academic interests is the plight of all African American women, and especially African American women who have graduated from college. The son of a Haitian mother and Nigerian father, Aifuwa tries to get around the world.

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Q: Professor Losano, please tell us more about your academic background.
A: I have a B.A. from Boston University, where I triple majored in English, Classics and Biology. I have an M.A. from UNC-Chapel Hill and an M.A. from Cornell University, both in English. I have a Ph.D. in English from Cornell. I’m interested in women’s writing of all kinds, but I specialize in Victorian (19th century British) women’s fiction.

Q: What is your connection to Women’s and Gender Studies?
A: All my work could be termed Women’s Studies in one way or another. At the simplest level, I study and teach literature by female authors. Beyond that, however, most of my research engages with issues and problems of gender in some way.

Q: What do you focus on in your research?
A: The book I have just finished focuses on gender. In the book, I look at 19th century novels by British women writers that feature painter-heroes. I explore how the women painters in these novels become mouthpieces for the authors to articulate their beliefs about aesthetics (what is art, and who can make it) and gender politics. Women painters in the 19th century were generally more radical and bohemian than their “sister-artists” (that is, novelists), so women novelists were able to speak their more inflammatory ideas via images of women painters. The book I’ve just started also concentrates on gender politics. I’m exploring the history of solitude from the 18th to early 20th centuries, continued on page 12.
Karin Hanta: Minou, you are the daughter of Minerva Mirabal and Manolo Tavárez, two freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives to bring about democracy in the Dominican Republic. What was it like growing up with this legacy?

Minou Tavárez Mirabal: Living in the shadow of four heroes, my mother's two sisters included, has its pros and cons, highs and lows. Heroism isn’t passed on in one’s genes. During adolescence, for example, I rebelled against my legacy and tried to do things my way. I realized that my legacy brought with it more responsibilities, however. I learned that my actions could affect a legacy that doesn’t belong to me.

KH: Can you describe how your aunt Dedé and your grandmother raised you in the absence of your parents?

MTM: They raised me without hate for the perpetrators of this terrible crime. We lived by several principles: First, “Work dignifies.” In our family, you had to be of service to your community to deserve praise. Secondly, my aunt and grandmother would say, “The hero has already died. Now YOU have to show what is in you.” They also encouraged us to never indulge in self-pity. We had a family, we were not total orphans. And lastly, they always said, “La sangre no se compra — You cannot buy blood.” We never took any compensation from the government for the murder of my mother and my two aunts.

KH: What was the root of political activism in your family, in your opinion?

MTM: Even though my grandmother couldn’t read and write, she and her family helped Dominican patriots fight the U.S. invasion as early as 1917. Their house was burnt to the ground when she was 12 years old. Her family also saved a resistance fighter from a certain death. Had they not helped him, he would have died from his burns. There is also a story in my family about my mother’s innate sense of freedom. She had a heron for a pet. One day, they forgot to cut the bird’s wings, so it flew away. Minerva was not upset, however. She just said to her father, “See, papa, even birds love freedom.”

KH: How did you become involved in politics?

MTM: When I was born, politics was already there. From early on, I was involved in community action groups. In 2002, I was elected to the Dominican House of Representatives. I first won the nomination within my party and then the district. In 2006, I was re-elected until 2010.

KH: Did the Mirabal name earn you a lot of political capital during the campaign?

MTM: Of course, people said to me during the campaign, “I will vote for you because of your name.” To which I replied, “But my father and mother will not sit in Congress. It will be ME who will take action.” Having said that, I have to admit that when I make decisions, I feel the presence of my mother and father. I ask myself, “What would my mother or father say?”

You know, this horrendous crime was not only committed against my mother and her sisters, but against other people, as well -- against us, the children, because it robbed us of the possibility to receive the values and wisdom of our parents. Even though I didn’t use the image and legacy of the “muchachas” in the campaign, I did focus on women’s is-
sues. Interestingly, my (mostly male) advisers told me that I shouldn’t touch these topics because they were not a high priority. Of course, I went against their advice and lots of women supported me. I organized two important activities, “Nosotras” – “We Women,” a big artistic event with female singers, poets, writers, and artists; and “Jovenes enamorados de una idea,” “Young people in love with an idea,” an event that galvanized Dominican youth. In the House, I am serving as President of the Foreign Relations Committee. I have also been a non-permanent member of the Gender Committee to work on the new penal code.

KH: What are some of the most pressing issues related to gender in the Dominican Republic today?

MTM: First of all, Domestic violence is a grave problem. Close to one-thousand Dominican women died from injuries sustained in domestic violence incidents since 2000. Our new penal code has to take a firmer stance on DV. So far, DV is a taboo. People say that it is a family issue and that no one should get involved. But it affects the society as a whole. Secondly, abortion has not been legalized in the Dominican Republic, either. The Dominican Republic is a very conservative society in its discourse, but not in its behavior. It has the second highest rate of illegal abortions in Latin America. Botched abortions are the fourth most common cause of death among women. Women go to prison for having abortions. Who is most affected by this situation? Women in the lower socioeconomic group, of course! Women with higher incomes can afford to terminate their pregnancies in private clinics.

Third, the sexual exploitation going on in my country is horrendous. Even though prostitution is illegal, many children are sexually exploited in the tourism industry. Public measures have no impact and don’t endure. There is also a lot of sex trafficking to Europe that needs to be stopped. Fourth, gay rights are not even discussed in our country. They are not on our public agenda. There is a lot of harassment going on against gays in my country.

KH: Could you envision being president one day?

MTM: I could see myself as president one day. Right now, I have to work on improving the present, however. If I thought only about future, I wouldn’t be doing my job well. The future is cemented in the present. People need to see my actions. My political participation hopefully serves as an inspiration for other women. Society is not going to do what we women want as long as half of the population is excluded or participating in insignificant numbers.
2. How does gender fit in with your understanding of diversity? What are the gender-based issues that are a priority for your office?

Gender plays a huge role in how I conceptualize diversity. I think it is unfortunate that diversity often is equated only with minorities, race, and ethnicity. One of the things that I noticed off-hand in the HRC report is that it hardly addressed the status of women and sexual orientation. I view diversity as multi-dimensional. It is about the intersection of class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, politics, and many other areas. I have thought about how OID can work closely with Chellis House and WAGS. I think it is important for a committee to come together and look at the status of women at the college. That is something that I will be involved in. When we are talking about diversity as an institution, it would be impossible and inappropriate not to have gender included in that.

3. In your Ph.D. and subsequent work have you focused on issues pertaining to Latino identity. Could you point out which of these issues is most salient for students at Middlebury?

My dissertation focused on racism among Latinos in the United States and their unique coping responses to experiences with racism. These incidents took place at every level. They were invisible stories that needed to be told. I will hopefully be teaching a “racism and mental health course” in the fall in the psychology department. One thing that has stood out to me about Middlebury during my recent talks with various students and groups on campus is the overall feeling that there is a lack of real honest dialogue. What I hear from students is that there is a culture of politeness here, which prevents conversations about diversity and difference.

Socioeconomic status is another issue that needs to be addressed on this campus. It seems like a powerful force, even within groups. The salient issue for students at a college that is predominately white, elite and affluent is how to find your way here and truly carve out a sense of community that feels real. In general, I believe all students struggle with finding out how you can challenge yourself and the people around you to do something differently … something less comfortable. On the positive side, I think that there are many students here who strive for that. But I think that systematically, across the faculty and administration, we have to help students to get there.

4. How do your personal and academic backgrounds shape your goals for OID?

There is no doubt that my personal background and life experience critically shape how I have come to this work and how I see my role at the College. I grew up in Brooklyn, New York. I am the first person in my immediate family to graduate from high school, let alone college, let alone a Ph.D. program. My parents are immigrants from the Dominican Republic. I was given the opportunity to go through a leadership program, the Posse Program, at Vanderbilt, one of the best universities in the country. I have lived out part of the so-called American dream because education facilitated life-changing experiences for me. My educational experiences have instilled a commitment to public service and higher education in me. I think that higher education has the potential to critically change the face of this country and this world so that our leaders on every level truly represent the demographics of our world. I see college as an opportunity to teach social responsibility and global thinking. We have a responsibility as a college to address the lack of opportunities and education in this country. For Middlebury, it means that we have to create these opportunities. We have to be a bridge and create a community that allows people of all backgrounds to get there and thrive here as students, faculty, and staff.
asking what it meant in different contexts for a person to be alone. What did it mean for an upper class Victorian woman to be alone, versus a working class man? Were servants ever ‘alone’ in any way? Did philosophy or religion believe solitude to be important for the health of the individual, and if so, why? In many historical time periods, solitude was considered dangerous for women, and society was arranged to prevent such a state. Different social orders have valued—or devalued—solitude differently across time, and I’m curious to see how literature reflects these changes. Likewise, all the articles I’ve ever published have focused on gender in some way or another. I’ve written about exercise videos, which are certainly loaded with gendered ideologies, and I’ve written on various women painters and women writers from the 19th century.

Q: Which WAGS classes are you teaching at Middlebury?
A: I have taught many WAGS courses at Middlebury—“Reading Women’s Writing,” “Victoria’s Secrets,” “WAGS 200,” and a first year seminar called “Smart Girls” among others. I’ve loved every minute of these courses. The students have always been incredibly vibrant and engaged, willing to tackle hard questions. Even in my non-WAGS courses, however, I always bring up the subject of gender in some way (or in many ways). After all, gender is part of who we each are, part of our social fabric and integral to our political belief systems. Literature’s job is to represent all of this complex mixture, and questions of gender have always played a key part of our literary heritage.

Beauty Products May Give You Breast Cancer

Beware of Paraben Preservatives in Body Care Products

Excerpt from an article from the Scientist.com news service:

Preservative chemicals found in samples of breast tumours probably came from underarm deodorants, UK scientists have claimed.

Their analysis of 20 breast tumours found high concentrations of para-hydroxybenzoic acids (parabens) in 18 samples. Parabens can mimic the hormone estrogen, which is known to play a role in the development of breast cancers. The preservatives are used in many cosmetics and some foods to increase their shelf-life.

“From this research it is not possible to say whether parabens actually caused these tumours, but they may certainly be associated with the overall rise in breast cancer cases,” says Philip Harvey, an editor of the Journal of Applied Toxicology, which published the research.

“Given that breast cancer is the largest killer of women and a very high percentage of young women use underarm deodorants, I think we should be carrying out properly funded, further investigations into parabens and where they are found in the body,” Harvey told New Scientist.

The research project was led by molecular biologist Philippa Darbre, at the University of Reading. She says that the ester-bearing form of parabens found in the tumours indicates it came from something applied to the skin, such as an underarm deodorant, cream or body spray. When parabens are eaten, they are metabolised and lose the ester group, making them less strongly estrogen-mimicking.

“One would expect tumours to occur evenly, with 20 per cent arising in each of the five areas of the breast,” Darbre said. “But these results help explain why up to 60 per cent of all breast tumours are found in just one-fifth of the breast - the upper-outer quadrant, nearest the underarm.”

For a list of paraben-free products, please go to www.thinkbeforeyoupink.org.

Would you like to mentor middle school girls? -- Join the Sister-to-Sister Program!

Sister-to-Sister brings together middle school girls from Bristol, Middlebury and Vergennes with Middlebury College student mentors. With the help of “campus supervisors,” mentors develop experiences that encourage girls to try new things outside of the classroom including such activities as art, music, dance, sign language, and yoga. Sister-to-Sister also focuses on discussions of such topics as body image, women in history, relationships, popularity, self-defense, identity and the internet, and self confidence. The group usually meets on Monday at 7 p.m. at Chellis House.

If you would like to join, please contact Karin Hanta at 443-5937 or khanta@middlebury.edu.